

Common Folk Oral History Collection
Interview OR.0362.01 : Tape 1

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Location of Interview: Nyemo, Tibet Autonomous Region, China

Date of Interview: 2002

Language of Interview: Tibetan

Interviewed by: Gyatso

Name: Sonam Gyaltzen [Tib. bsod nams rgyal mtshan]

Gender: Male

Age: 73

Date of Birth: 1929

Abstract

The interviewee was a treba villager in Nyemo Xiang. In this interview he talks about in describes his childhood and his family situation. He also discusses his actions after the Chinese took control of Tibet and why his family was classified as a "middle peasant." He mentions the incident of the Nun in 1969 and also talks about delivering the "Donation Grain" and the "Selling Grain" and how the government collected a large amount of money for the fertilizers, irrigation and medical fee.

Tape 1

Q: What is your name?

A: My name is Sonam Gyaltzen

Q: How old are you?

A: I am 73 years old.

Q: Were you a native of this place?

A: Yes. Our family's name is Natsog Gojang [Tib. sna tshogs ? sgo byang].

Q: Was your family a treba?

A: Yes.

Q: At that time, how much land did you have?

A: We had one third of a gang and another half of a gang. From the beginning our family members were not capable.

Q: When you were 7-8 years old, how many family members did you have?

A: At the time of the reforms, we had 20 family members.

Q: Were you a big household in the past?

A: There were many households bigger than us, like Trungkhar [Tib. 'khrungs mkhar] and those households. We were treba from the beginning.

Q: At that time, how many brothers and sisters did you have?

A: I had 4 brothers and 2 sisters.

Q: Were you the eldest one?

A: I had an elder sister. She was a nun. She became mad when she was 25 years old. She is still alive and now is 76-77 years

old.

Q: How did she become mad?

A: She was doing a lot of religious practices which it was said caused her to become mad. She was very knowledgeable; she was like a lama. Her younger sister was also a nun, she was born in the monkey year and now she is about 71-72.

Q: Was she in a nunnery?

A: Yes. At the time of the reforms, we had 20 family members. After that one daughter was given the share of three people and lived separately. The other ones were all in the family. Now we have 18 family members. We had a very large area of fields and at the beginning we were saying that we would not be able to plant so much, but now we can manage that. In this area we were the biggest household.

At the time of their grandfathers, they had 10 children. We have three brides. My son has a bride and he has two daughters. And I have 8 children; three sons and five daughters. There were another two brides. That was from the early times.

A: At the time, when I was working, my parents had three grand-fathers and one grand-mother. In the early times, the elderly were working very well, but I couldn't work.

Q: When you were small, what did you do?

A: I had to start working when I was very young because we had many elderly members in the family and there were not many workers. We had a large area of land on which I worked very hard. At that time, we had to work in the fields. We would also go to Lhasa to transport goods to get some income, like people go to Lhasa nowadays. I was transporting goods produced in India for the government to Lhasa.

At that time, we had to work for the different kind of taxes according to the land that we had. But we don't know anything about that history, because we didn't have knowledge. I was just doing farming all the time.

Q: How was the livelihood of your family at the time of the Mutual Aid Team?

A: At that time, it was under the Tibet Autonomous Region. Whether it was correct or not, all people were talking about that policy in all the parts of Tibet. Nowadays, the PRC has become great and people don't want to work in the fields because they are indulging in pleasures. Nowadays, I have to tell the people that farmers should work in the fields and the other people should do the other works.

Since the reforms there had been a great change. I don't remember the time, but at one time people's grain ran out. At that time, even I didn't do anything particularly. I had to follow the situation with others. I was just leading a humble life. I never talked about opposing the revolution. At that time, I used to tell the children that if you follow the other people when they are destroying things, in the future when you would be cornered, nobody would come to help you. That was like the proverb, "The mother would not be able to help her daughter when she would be in a sad condition." [Tib. bu mo skyo sar a mas phan mi yong]. To tell you the truth, one of our children was a servant. He was just forced to do that. But afterwards he was imprisoned for quite a long time. He was a servant of the lord Dogönpa [Tib. rdo mgon pa].

At the time of the reforms, I told them that my child was not the main person. The main persons were still alive. They asked me if I can prove that face-to-face. I told them that I can do that. After that, I was told to prove that before the masses of Nyayul [Tib. ?], Gonsar [tib. dgon gsar] and Gyabu [Tib. rgya phu]. At that point I told them that my child had done this and that. And you guys had done this and that. At that time, the people who were implementing the reforms said I was great to prove that and that was the truth. Therefore, we were not included in the reforms [as trerim (class enemies)]. Otherwise, our properties would have been [confiscated and] distributed [to others] in the reforms. At that time, the Khambas and the [Chinese] government were confronting each other.

Since then, in 1968 [during the Cultural Revolution and the Ani's revolt], I told my children and my family members, "Do not make a single move. Keep your mouth shut. When they call us to the meetings, just go there and keep quiet. Leave the soldiers alone and do not even push a cadre. If you do that, it would make us to become without food to eat" My family member's standard of knowledge was poor, so they didn't go to do those things. Otherwise, many households were damaged.

At that point, some of the youngsters went through the motions of charging forward, so their households were damaged. I was always telling my children to be stable. Do not behave showoffish. There is no way for people who are showoffish. One day the government would come holding a book and they will ask you according to the contents of the book. That will not be easy. The policy is not easy to deal with.

In 1968, at the beginning, they told me that I should be a representative. I refused, but they were insisting. But I didn't make a single move, I kept saying that I can't do that. When they were calling me to the meetings, I would send my children. Why was I doing that at that moment? I was thinking we should consider our livelihood. If you agree with some people spontaneously and follow the talk of the bad people and do something reckless, that will lead you to prison.

During the reforms, when they were distributing shares to the people like taking care of dzo and cows, I was afraid and I told the cadres that I don't need any share for my children. I have cushions and a table at home. I was thinking that if I receive a share, the masses were sensitive and they might say that my child was a work supervisor, [Tib. las skul] [for the lord's estate] in the past.

Actually, there was a work supervisor called Kungkhar Nyerpa [Tib. sku mkhar gnyer pa]. Once my son was sent as his substitute

to be the work supervisor because he was a youngster at that time. Therefore he was like that.

At the beginning, the policy of "Oppose Three and Two Exemptions" [Tib. ngo rgol gsum dang chag yang gnyis] was implemented. They held meetings for about 1-2 months. They were saying we were not allowed to attend the meetings because of my child [his working for the lord]. So I had to stay home.

After that, my child came back from Lhasa. Before that he was working as a servant. I took him and went to see the cadres who were implementing the reforms. It was embarrassing. I told them all about the work that I had done and that I went to this and that place, as well as about what the other people did. At that time, the cadres who were implementing the reform said, "Nobody was talking like that in the xiang. We have been wasting our time in holding meetings for 2 months.". And they cornered the leaders of the xiang.

At that moment, the leaders of the xiang told me, "We were not talking about you like that. Only the cadre who were implementing the reforms told you not to attend the meetings. After you told the cadre those things, we were told to hold meetings for six nights and they were making us suffer and we had to talk about you all that time. It seemed that they came to lose their way.

At that time it would not be okay to harm the neighbors. I just told them how they supported the Khambas and how they went on the road. I told all these things in detail. So, the cadres were saying that I was great and that I told them some great things. At that time, there was a cadre called Nyima Dorje [Tib. nyi ma rdo rje] who was living in Jarag Linga [Tib sbyar rag gling ga]. That cadre was a great person. He wore eyeglasses. I told him all the things that I had done and all the things that other people had done. I was thinking that they would know about that. I also told them about being a treba in the past and about my child working as a substitute for the work supervisor and how he was treated .

At that time, I also told the cadres that my children were small and I have some elderly people at home. And I said that we had never exploited other people. The only thing was about my child's work . I said that we are not able to manage our livelihood as all of us are elderly people, so we have to go to beg for food.

The cadre said, "Never mind. You didn't exploit people and one day they would make a [new] calculation." At that time, we had many leased fields for which half the yield goes to the owner and the other half goes to the planter. The cadre said, "That was a kind of exploitation and they will calculate that. Don't worry about that, nothing will happen to you."

After that, the roof of one of my rooms was almost collapsing. On the day when I was repairing the roof, there was a person called Chinzi Lhamo [Tib. ? lha mo] from Gönsar [Tib. dgon gsar] who was telling me that it was wrong for me to prove face-to-face about the deeds of those other people. He was saying something in a biased manner. Usually the masses were talking a lot like that.

Actually, at that time her child was also there doing those things. She was blaming me for holding a struggle session against them. At that time, the masons and carpenters were saying that they had heard that my house is going to be sealed so they told me that it would be useless to rebuild the house. They were about to go back.

After that, I went to see the cadres who were implementing the reforms and I told them, "When I was building my house the people had heard from Gönsar that my house is going to be sealed. Please help me so that my house would not get sealed." At that point, the cadre called Nyima Dorje said, "You have proved the deeds of those people face-to-face amongst the masses, Chinzi Lhamo was probably supporting the reactionaries. Never mind, go ahead and build your house. Who was saying that to you?" I said, "Probably, Chinzi Lhamo was saying that." The cadres said, "Never mind, tell your grand-parents not to cry. You have done the right thing and said the right thing.

Actually, Gönsar was a small place. when they were saying that the people didn't know the facts. They were just asking questions to each other. Tamdrin Wangchug [Tib. rta mgrin dbang rgyal of Mönrog [Tib. smon rog] was a tantric practitioner, whose house was just over there. He was a great person in the past, so probably they were showing partiality towards him like other Tibetan people and told me like that. And they were also showing partiality towards the Jugpön Kungkhar Nyerpa. So, when they were classifying people's class ranks, we were not included in the trerim. We were classified as middle peasants.

After that, the events of Trinley Chödrön [Tib. 'phrin las chos sgron], the nun of Phusum occurred in Nyemo County. Actually, the people of the xiang knew about the situation, but she was just going to the mountain at night. We could not stop her. Nowadays, she is in the county seat and begging from the traders. I can not control her. She is really shameless. It has been many years since the reform, but the subordinate people were praising those people and some people were thinking that she was true.

The mad nun was imprisoned for about 1-2 months. They were saying that she [his sister] the Ani, but actually it was not like that. After that I went to bring food to the mad nun, but she broke three thermos bottles. She became mad when she was 25 years old.

At that time, I told them that I can guarantee that she didn't make any rumors. She was really mad and didn't have relations with Phusum. They were asking her where will the mule and the bird come to Nyemo and so on.

Later on, the cadre called Lobsang Chödrag [Tib. blo bzang chos grags] came and he said she was always going to the mountain at night, so how could she make rumors and do destructive things. He was attentive of her, but those people said that she was up to something and therefore she was taken away .

After that, the leader of the three in the county asked people in the prison whether the mad nun had relation with the nun of Phusum and whether she is really mad. At that time, there was a Khamba from Dongkar [Tib. gdong dkar] called Tenzin Phüntsho [Tib. bstan 'dzin phun tshogs]. He told the leader that the mad nun was one of the nuns of Phusum. Therefore, they made her suffer severely. I heard that the other people said that she couldn't hold her food bowl and that she is disturbing our sleep and she

is really mad. In the prison, she was running around saying that her relative had brought merchandise.

After she came back home, she said that she was happy in the prison. That was because we brought food to her. She was giving some dough and meat saying that she had brought those from Lhasa.

At that time, the children were grown up into youngsters, and I was telling them, "If you want food to eat, you should just stay home, do not listen to anybody. The government is not easy to deal with and one day you will be subdued. How could a small area challenge the government. They had already arrived in Tibet. You should not touch anybody." That was why our situation was not bad and at the time of the investigation nobody had anything to say about us.

I had been working very hard as a treba in the society, and after the revolution I was still working very hard. Two of the youngsters from our family went to do road building. We got a lot of prizes hanging from here to here that were given for the work done by my children. Once the cadre called the Jensei Kunpel-la, [Tib. spyan bsal kun 'phel lags] he was a great person, he came for an inspection to my home. He said, "You are great to have gotten so many prizes. You shouldn't destroy them. In the future there will be a benefit for your hard work." One of my sons was a soldier and he also got 2-3 prizes. Two persons went to dig gold to a place called Naroji for many years to make some income.

Q: The income was quite good digging gold, right?

A: That mine was located in three countries like Tö Shentsa [Tib. stod shan rtsa] and Pangkong [Tib. ?]. And there was another place just below Tö. We also went there. This year they said they are going to send Chinese people to work digging gold because the Chinese didn't have work to do. Before that, we sent two people to work on that for more than 6-7 years.

Q: Both of them were your sons, right?

A: One of them is my son and the other one is my grandson. I used to tell my children, "Digging gold is not an easy job and they were saying they would execute you if you stole gold. They definitely will execute you if you steal so do not steal things. You can receive your wages and whatever they give you. If you steal, you will be imprisoned and disgraced in your homeland".

At the time of the events in Phusum, people didn't deliver the grain to the government, but on the next day [after the revolt], they had to deliver two years worth.

Q: The next year you were told to deliver it for two years, so was that very difficult for you?

A: Yes. Because of this how could we have any grain remaining for us. The event in Phusum ruined all the people. I was always telling my children to trust the policy.

But at the low level they were saying that this was a serious matter and they were making people suffer. because of that revolution, all the rich people became rich, so people are not willing to do farming and want to show an imposing appearance like a lord [Tib. dpon nyams].

Nowadays, we have to buy chemical fertilizer which costs 1,500 yuan per year. In the beginning, they were also collecting a water fee, but later it was said that that was support for building the canal. Some people were asking why they were collecting the water fee and I was telling them that it was to support building the canal.

Q: Altogether you have to pay quite good amount of money, right?

A: Yes. We have to pay a little more than 2,000 yuan per year. They also collect medical fees. At first they were collecting 18 yuan from each person per year and later they were collecting 10 yuan. At the time, when we had to deliver the Donation Grain and the Selling Grain, we had to load 20-30 donkeys with grain. At that time, the yield was good. We had a difficult time because we had to work on a large area of land.

After that, people were saying that it would be better to set up the rukhag, so it was set up for 12 years. At that time, people didn't need to be scared. If someone is content with one's lot, the livelihood was also not bad. At the time of gentsang (household responsibility system), it was amazing. After the government came, even now we have to deliver 70-80 khe of grain for the chemical fertilizer. We have to buy 26-27 loads of fertilizer every year.

Q: Do you have to buy that every year?

A: Yes, and we have to pay 100 yuan for a load of fertilizer.

Q: Actually, do you need so much fertilizer for your fields?

A: Yes, we need that much fertilizer because we have a very large area of land. Some of the households don't need so much.

Q: You have to pay a lot of money to the government, right?

A: Yes, we have to pay a great amount of money. Some people also have to leave a kind of deposit called the thenshag [Tib. 'then bzhang], but we didn't need to leave a deposit because we made a big of investment in the rukhag. And we have to pay 400 yuan for planting a field that belonged to other people. Some people were saying that if we had a kind of pass to show them, there would be some exemption on delivering the grain.

I was hoping for one of my sons to become a cadre, but my son is not capable, so he is in Lhasa just like a beggar. At first, he was

taught carpentry and was working for about 6 years in this area. At that time, there was a Chinese called Liu Zongdian who was doing construction. He was very fond of my son, but at that point, the leaders of the rukhag were saying that my son should do farming and they will not send him to work on construction. Later, I sent him to become a soldier when the sons of the leaders of Nyemo County were sent to become soldiers. He was in the Army for 3 years, but he didn't become a cadre because he was not capable.